

1963

Where they are now

The Camelotians

By Donald Smith

It was a strange place for an Irish wake. But that's really what was going on there in the rear-most compartment of Air Force One as it roared through a dark southland sky toward Washington. Still febrile Secret Service agents stalked the length of the plane's narrow passageway. Up front, Lyndon B. Johnson, Clifton Carter and Bill D. Moyers were sitting as an *ad hoc* committee on the transition of Government, already plotting agendas for meetings with Congressional leaders. But in the back, Lawrence F. O'Brien, Kenneth P. O'Donnell, David F. Powers and Mrs. John F. Kennedy sat with the heavy metal casket that contained the body of the 35th President of the United States. The first series of shocks had passed, and now, with the widow listening, the others swapped stories about the dead man, all of them trying to fix in their minds the still incredible fact of his death. They had not yet begun to imagine what their personal futures might be like.

"Dave recalled how he and the President joked about funerals," O'Donnell wrote later. "The black limousine from the White House reminded them of an undertaker's car. When they rode in it to church on a holy day or a Sunday, President Kennedy would say to Dave, pretending that they were Knights of Columbus on the way to a funeral, 'Which of our worthy brothers are we burying today?'"

Powers had first met Kennedy in the front hallway of his cold-water flat in Boston's Charlestown when Kennedy had come to ask the young former Army Air Force sergeant for help in that district during Kennedy's first race for Congress in 1946.

Later, Kennedy, the younger of the two, came to rely on Powers's blue-collar political cunning as well as his knack for diverting Kennedy's attention from his troubles during his rise through the brackish waters of state politics. Powers remained with him the whole time, personable, unambitious, undemanding and loyal. He had an evidently bottomless reservoir of lace-curtain Irish folk wit, and a gift for telling stories that he understood his role and delighted in it. With O'Donnell, who was Kennedy's appointments secretary in the White House, and O'Brien, the legislative aide, Powers had been attracted to Kennedy from the first, like steel filings to a magnet. The patterns of all three lives had ranged themselves around Kennedy, and when the magnet was dead, but their own political lives were still locked in and frozen. Pale, hair-thin, blood-streaked, they talked through time and space.

Mrs. Kennedy had been thinking about the funeral. Now, as Powers told his stories, she turned to him and said, "Oh, Dave, you've been

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Jack all these years. What will you do now?"
What would all of them do?

For some, the grantees of the Kennedy Establishment, the men he had picked to run the key sectors of his Government, it was relatively easy. They had made their reputations elsewhere, independently, and most of them simply returned to their professions, not only unhurt by their White House association but permanently burnished by history. Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense under Kennedy and later under Johnson, stepped out of the Pentagon directly into the sleek Washington offices of the World Bank, which he continues to run with the same clockwork stealth that first brought him to the chairmanship of the Ford Motor Company. He earns \$50,000 a year—after taxes. Kennedy's brother-in-law, R. Sargent Shriver Jr., who had been the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations' most conspicuously energetic bureaucrat as Director of the Peace Corps and later at the Office of Economic Opportunity, was inherited by Richard Nixon as the American Ambassador to France. He left and joined a New York City law firm in 1971, pausing briefly to flirt with immortality again by becoming George McGovern's running mate in the 1972 Presidential campaign. He has since applied his name to such Kennedyesque enterprises as IF (about 100,000 ex-Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers who are involved in volunteer projects in some 20 American cities and to whom Shriver is chief adviser) and he remains the subject of cyclical rumors that eventually he plans to run for the governorship of Maryland. McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's national security adviser, was, in 1966, elected president of the Ford Foundation, where he serves today at a salary of \$98,000. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Kennedy's umbilical cord to the Eastern liberal Establishment, had already won one Pulitzer Prize for his study of the Jacksonian era, and after the assassination he proceeded to take another for his encyclopedic memoir, "A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House." The next year Schlesinger took up residence at the City University of New York as Schweitzer professor of humanities at \$36,200 a year. He has remained through the Nixon years a critic-in-exile of American society and politics, and an ardent film reviewer for *Vogue*.

So it went. For these and most of the other grantees, the rolls of post-Camelot achievement grow more baroque as time goes by. But for that other group, the inner circle, those who had been with the Kennedys the longest, the druids of the Irish Mafia and a few other non-Irish interlopers, the 10 years since Kennedy's death have held more ravages than would seem proportional.

Some have fared well enough. O'Brien, despite an untimely waltz in the stock market and later grief as the person who presided over the Democratic party during the McGovern terror, still has ex-grantee status if only as the former Postmaster General of the Johnson Administration. He lives in a suite at the Sheraton-Park Hotel

on Connecticut Avenue in upper Northwest Washington, tending to his \$6.4-million Watergate suit against the Republicans and at work on the manuscript of his own political memoirs. Occasionally he holds court with cronies at Duke Ziebert's Restaurant, where waiters are careful to see he does not have to sit near certain other habitués, like Richard Nixon's former personal lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach.

Powers himself has landed as a \$30,000-a-year, GS-15 civil servant. He is curator of the John F. Kennedy Library museum, temporarily located in Waltham, Mass. Those who see him regularly say he is delighted to spend his days in a sort of time capsule, closer than any of the rest to the man he served for so long through the physical objects he left behind. "We want to build a museum where you would almost expect to step through the door and meet the President," he says.

But disturbing threads of ill fortune also appear in the post-White House days of the inner circle. Political failure, financial and marital troubles, ill health. Perhaps one shouldn't make too much of it. "I suppose if you were to go to a class reunion you would find the same thing," said one Washington journalist who knew them all in their heyday. "Some made it and some didn't." Still, one might have predicted a brighter future for those who had shared a proximity to power and grandeur matched by few other men.

The divorce rate may well be normal for the rest of the country. Three months before the assassination, Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy's chief speechwriter and campaign adviser and later his White House counsel, divorced his first wife after 14 years of marriage and three children. So much for the pressures of working in the White House. But his remarriage in 1964 lasted only five years, and he married a third time in 1969. Pierre Salinger, Kennedy's press secretary, left his wife and three children in 1965 after eight years of marriage. He and his new wife now have a son. Schlesinger, one of the grantees, also divorced and remarried.

Several of the crowd found that experience in politics is not automatically applicable to making business profits. Salinger left politics after an unsuccessful run for the United States Senate in 1964, reportedly \$100,000 in debt. After a try at the discothèque business in Los Angeles went sour, he became a premier wheeler-dealer in an overseas investment fund, Gramco, which he helped found. The firm and several subsidiaries ran onto legal shoals, and last May Salinger and 34 others connected with the company were named in a \$40-million lawsuit charging them with setting up corporations to avoid Securities and Exchange Commission regulations.

O'Brien was another business casualty. The day after he resigned as chairman of the Democratic National Committee in 1969, he was appointed president of McDonnell & Co., an old-line Wall Street brokerage firm that had ambitions of ex-

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